DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 983 IR 056 358

AUTHOR	Wales, Barbara; And Others
TITLE	CMSU Library Usage: Telephone Survey Results.
INSTITUTION	Central Missouri State Univ., Warrensburg.
PUB DATE	Apr 97
NOTE	21p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Libraries; College Students; Higher Education; Library Materials; Library Services; *Library Surveys; *Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; Telephone Surveys; *Use Studies; User Needs (Information); User Satisfaction (Information)
IDENTIFIERS	*Central Missouri State University

ABSTRACT

The Assessment Committee of Library Services at Central Missouri State University conducted a telephone survey of 500 (41.2% completion rate) university students. The goals were to use a random sampling in order to gain more information regarding usage patterns of library services; to identify factors which inhibit patron use; and to reveal obstacles to service. Surveys were conducted by telephone over the course of 10 weeks. One individual, the Assessment Committee intern, made all the calls. When asked about visiting library services this academic year, 90% responded positively. Responses indicated that students use the library for several reasons: 82.2% check out materials; 79.57% complete class assignments; 67.74% use the copiers; 65.05% get help finding information; and 60.22% study at the library. Approximately one-third of the students who use the library did not seem to be discouraged in any way from using it. Among the remaining two-thirds surveyed, the following discouragements were cited: 25.81% felt that the library does not have needed materials; 25.27% cited parking problems; 21.51% thought that the hours could be extended; 14.52% disliked the building temperature; 13.44% thought that noise was a problem; and 18.28% cited other reasons. Some students indicated they preferred to use other libraries; the most frequent reasons for this included convenience and availability of more materials. The two primary deterrents to use cited by library users were parking (25%) and a feeling that the library does not have the materials needed (25%). The survey instrument and a table of student uses for the library by rank are appended. (AEF)

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CMSU LIBRARY USAGE: TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

Barbara Wales, Assistant Professor
Education Librarian, Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, MO

Mary Tygett, Assistant Professor
Business & Social Sciences Librarian
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, MO

Harry Harmon, Associate Professor of Marketing
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, MO

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CMSU LIBRARY USAGE:
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

Librarians are constantly seeking feedback from users. Since 1991, Library Services at Central Missouri State University has conducted a variety of assessment activities designed to measure client satisfaction and effectiveness of service. Realizing that most such activities focus on the user and ignore the non-user, the Assessment Committee conducted a telephone survey of university students, utilizing a random sample size of 500. The instrument was purposefully brief and sought to discover why students use the library and factors which discourage use.

In an era of shrinking financial support and growing demand for libraries' services, assessment of user satisfaction with libraries has become increasingly critical. Library Services at Central Missouri State University initiated a comprehensive assessment program in 1991. The Dean of Library Services established an Assessment Committee, consisting of faculty and professional staff members, and charged to conduct various activities to determine effectiveness of services, client satisfaction, barriers to improved service, and employee satisfaction. The program was designed as an ongoing process with several elements. A complete report of the entire assessment package is available.[1]

During the spring semester of 1995, the Library Services Assessment Committee conducted a telephone survey of Central students. While the Committee has conducted previous student surveys, such instruments always involved students who were physically in the building at the time and could therefore be identified as "library users." In utilizing a telephone survey, the Committee hoped to query both users and non-users. A search of the literature reveals many studies directed at library users.

Few, however, focus on the non-user. Schlichter and Pemberton note that "...this is a frequent problem with surveys as they are directed at the user of library services and neglect the nonuser, who is far more difficult to reach, but who, even in a college or university environment, represents a significant portion of the population."[2]

After reviewing published surveys in SPEC kits[3] and considering criteria for telephone surveys[4], the Committee designed a survey. The goals were to utilize a random sampling of the student body in order to gain more information regarding usage patterns of Library Services; to identify factors which inhibit patron use; and to reveal obstacles to service. The Committee intentionally kept the instrument as short as possible while still addressing our primary concerns. As Central plans for a new building scheduled for completion in 1998, consideration of such factors is critical.

Design of the Study

After consulting with the campus Institutional Research Office, Reporting and Testing Services, and a Marketing Research faculty member who has assisted the Committee with other assessment activities, a sample size of 500 was decided upon. The University's computer services office generated a random sample of 500 Central students for the survey. Along with students' names, they provided a phone number and rank for each student. No distinction was given to major, gender, or city of residence. (However, the interviewer indicated gender on the survey form.)

The surveys were conducted by telephone over the course of ten weeks. Students were called at various times during the afternoon and evening in an effort to reach as many as possible. One individual, the Assessment Committee intern, made all the calls. It was hoped that students would be more willing to share their comments with a peer. Utilizing only one interviewer also provided the benefit of a more consistent approach. Lavrakas stresses the potentially large advantage of telephone surveying over other methods of gathering survey data as "the opportunity for control provided by a centralized data collection process. If this control is properly exercised, the resulting data should be of high quality from the standpoint of lessening possible errors due to interviewers' behaviors."[5] The interviewer assured students that their answers would be confidential and that the survey would last approximately two minutes. At the time of the call, the interviewer entered responses into a database. If the individual agreed to the survey, the interviewer ascertained if the subject was a student employee of Library Services. If so, the interview was immediately terminated. Library employees were not interviewed because they may have different perceptions of the library than other students, possibly creating bias in the research results.

The interviewer then inquired about the student's major and library use. If the student had not been to the library during the current academic year, he was asked to indicate factors that discourage use. The interviewer prompted the subject with a list

of possible deterrents to use. If the respondent had been to the library during the current academic year, he was questioned as to the number of library visits during the current academic year. Next, the student was asked to indicate usage patterns by responding to a list of possible reasons to visit the library. The last question concerned what, if anything, would discourage use. Finally, the caller expressed appreciation to the interviewee for agreeing to take the time to respond to the survey. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument.

Results

The survey generated 206 responses from the sample size of 500, for a 41.2% completion rate. Over 1000 telephone calls were made, and at least two attempts were made to reach each student. Of the 206 responses, 86 were from students living on campus, 66 from students living off-campus in Warrensburg, and 54 from students living outside Warrensburg. Ninety of the respondents were male; the remaining 116 were female. Four of the respondents were employees of Library Services and as such were disqualified from the survey.

When asked about visiting Library Services this academic year, 186 (90%) responded positively and 16 (10%) responded negatively. Table 1 illustrates that visits to the library were fairly equal among respondents, with 21.51% visiting the library once a week, 24.19% more than once a week, 24.19% every few weeks, and 30.11% several times a semester.

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TABLE 1 -
Visits to Ward Edwards Library
This Academic Year

	Responses	%
More than once a week	45	24.19
Once a week	40	21.51
Every few weeks	45	24.19
Several times a semester	56	30.11
Total	186	100.00

Table 2 shows that overall, students use the library for several reasons: 82.2% check out materials, 79.57% complete class assignments, 67.74% use the copiers, 65.05% get help finding information, and 60.22% study at the library. (See Appendix B for student uses by class rank.)

TABLE 2
Uses of Ward Edwards Library
(Indicate all that apply)

	Responses	%
To study	112	60.22
To check-out materials	153	82.26
To use the computer lab	66	35.48
To read current newspaper/magazines	75	40.32
To complete class assignments	147	79.57
To get help finding information	121	65.05
To socialize	20	10.75
To meet for a group project	84	45.16
To use the copiers	126	67.74
Other	10	5.38

As Table 3 demonstrates, approximately one-third (57 of 186) of the students who use the library did not seem to be discouraged in any way from using it. Among the remaining two-thirds of the students surveyed, the following discouragements were cited: 25.81% felt that the library does not have needed materials, 25.27% cited parking problems, 21.51% thought that the hours could be extended, 14.52% disliked the building temperature, 13.44% thought that noise was a problem, and 18.28% cited other reasons.

TABLE 3
Reasons Discouraged from using Ward Edwards Library
Responses by Users
(Indicate all that apply)

	Responses	%
Concerns about security	4	2.15
Hours	40	21.51
Noise	25	13.44
Temperature	27	14.52
Parking	47	25.27
Prefer to use another library	18	9.68
Not enough help available	18	9.68
Library doesn't have materials	48	25.81
Other	34	18.28
None	57	30.65

As Table 4 reveals, students cited various reasons for not using Ward Edwards Library this academic year: 56.25% remarked that it was not required by their coursework, 56.25% said that there was no need, 25% preferred to use another library, and 68.75% noted other reasons.

TABLE 4
Reasons Discouraged from Using Ward Edwards Library
Responses from Non-Users
(Indicate all that apply)

	Responses	%
Not required for coursework	9	56.25
No need	9	56.25
Use another library	4	25.00
Library doesn't have materials	1	6.25
Hours	1	6.25
Other	11	68.75

Some students prefer to use other libraries. The most frequent reasons given for using other libraries included convenience and the availability of more materials. The most popular libraries used are the various locations of Mid-Continent Public Library, located in the Kansas City metropolitan area, approximately fifty to seventy miles away; the University of Missouri at Kansas City, and the University of Kansas at Lawrence and the University of Missouri at Columbia, each approximately 100 miles away. Trails Regional Library, the local public library, and the residence hall library on campus were other popular alternatives.

Summary of Results

The completion rate (41.2%) was lower than anticipated. However, there were several problems with the information provided by the computer services office. First, many students did not list a local telephone number with the university. As a result, the sample contained the telephone numbers for many students' parents. While some parents provided a local phone number, others did not.

Second, 49 telephone numbers (9.8%) were listed incorrectly. In most cases, the student had moved without providing the university another telephone number. Third, some students provided a work telephone number rather than a home telephone number. When called at work, many of these students were not willing to participate in the survey. These complications are not uncommon; Dillman notes the inevitability of such problems when using telephone lists.[6]

Despite these difficulties, this survey represents a cross-section of the CMSU student population and provides valuable information. Perhaps most surprising is the fact that 90% of those contacted had used Library Services at least once this academic year. This is considerably higher than some of the librarians had expected. One possible explanation for this high figure may be the wording of the question: "Have you been to the CMSU Library this year?" A positive response would not necessarily indicate use of library resources; rather, a student could have been in the building to attend an instruction session, make a photocopy, or send a FAX, among other possible activities. However, it is interesting to note that the figure is in line with that found in a telephone survey at the University of Michigan. They discovered that 88% of the students reached in a telephone survey indicated they had used the library in the past year.[7]

It is worthwhile to consider the factors which inhibit student use. Responses are categorized into two groups: those who <u>have</u> used Library Services this academic year and those who <u>have not</u>. The two primary deterrents to use cited by library users are

parking (25%) and a feeling that the library doesn't have the materials needed (25%). The parking difficulty came as no surprise to librarians, who have heard numerous such complaints. Convenience, security, and ease of use--especially for students with disabilities--are all concerns. While the parking dilemma is not easily remedied in the existing environment, this issue will be addressed in our building planning process. However, due to the land-locked location of the university, the parking situation will only be eased somewhat, not resolved.

The other primary reason given, a lack of materials, was also cited by a quarter of the respondents and is a greater reason for concern. There could be a number of explanations for this. Perhaps students aren't aware that we have the materials; on the other hand, perhaps library personnel could be more active in helping students locate substitute materials for the ones we are lacking. Budgetary concerns limit the depth of our collection in some disciplines. These shortcomings can be partially alleviated through effective use of databases such as FirstSearch, currently subsidized by the library, and interlibrary loan services. Publicizing these opportunities, coupled with encouraging better use of locally-owned materials, might relieve this problem. Additionally, more frequent referral to the local public library may be needed. It has a stronger collection in some areas--popular materials, current fiction, travel, and genealogy materials, for instance--than we do. Its physical location (within three blocks

of the university library) and strong service orientation make it a logical referral point.

Another possible source of concern is the ineffective search strategies employed by students. Reference librarians are often aware that patrons need help refining or limiting a search. While reference personnel attempt to offer aid as needed, much CD-ROM search assistance is now provided by graduate assistants who are themselves not expert searchers. Further definition of the type of help we expect our graduate assistants to offer might eliminate some of these concerns. And, of course, all reference workers are familiar with the patron who could benefit from such assistance but does not realize or request it. It may be necessary for reference personnel to become more assertive in offering help. Rethinking the type and level of help available at the reference desk--whether for print or electronic resources--is critical. It is likely that improving the level of effectiveness in this regard would result in less patron frustration with collection gaps.

Not surprisingly, over twenty percent of the surveyed group mentioned hours as an obstacle to library use. (Since the survey was conducted, hours have been expanded slightly to 94.5 hours per week. Due to student demand, the library now stays open until midnight Sunday through Thursday night.) Temperature was considered a problem by 14%, while noise was listed as a discouragement to use by 13%. Many of the "other" reasons cited had to do with the building, laziness, or simply "not liking libraries."

The most frequent reason cited by non-users was lack of need. Several respondents were commuters and patronize other libraries. Only one person in this group said the library didn't own the materials needed. However, due to the low number of respondents in the non-user category (16, or 10%), generalizations cannot be made.

Conclusion

The Committee felt that the primary goals of this survey were met. Utilizing a random sample of university students, the Committee gained insight into usage patterns, identified factors which inhibit use, and ascertained students' perceptions of various barriers to improved service.

The most surprising finding was the low number (10%) of students identified as non-users. The committee had hoped to investigate more thoroughly reasons for lack of library use among this group. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this percentage of students is higher. That assumption, however, may be incorrect. It is also possible, as previously mentioned, that the definition of "user" is rather liberal. For instance, coming to the library occasionally to use the photocopier would quality one as a user. Perhaps identifying an infrequent user group or defining a more stringent interpretation of the term "user" would be helpful.

The survey findings will be helpful in planning the new building. The results confirm that parking problems are an impediment to using the library. This difficulty will be addressed in the new building, as will temperature control. Other problems will be dealt with much sooner; for example, public services librarians are

attempting to resolve the noise problem immediately. It is impossible to solve all noise difficulties in the existing library, due in large part to its architectural limitations and inflexible arrangement of facilities within the physical environment. Nevertheless, the librarians are committed to making a substantial improvement. The telephone survey and focus group discussions conducted as part of the Committee's assessment activities have all indicated client dissatisfaction with noise level.

Other reasons given for non-use of Library Services include the fact that coursework does not require such use; the opinion that library hours are too limited; and a belief that the library does not own the needed materials. These reasons suggest various responses on the part of library staff and administration.

In the case of limited library use required by teaching faculty members, bibliographers might be more aggressive in working with their departments and suggesting coordination of bibliographic instruction with coursework. The question of library hours is one that reappears regularly. A telephone survey of sister institutions in the state provided the librarians with necessary data for comparison purposes. Conducted in November of 1994, the survey included ten state-supported colleges and universities. It revealed that Central compares favorably to similar institutions in the state. These findings may not be reassuring to patrons who would like to see even more extended hours; however, they do provide valuable comparisons. As previously noted, hours have been

expanded somewhat. There is some discussion of attempting to poll students concerning their specific preferences regarding library hours.

The last reason for non-use, a belief that the library does not own the required resources, suggests several possible explanations and remedies. Perhaps a reminder to reference librarians to offer alternative sources would be in order. Faculty members sometimes send students to the library with out-dated bibliographies which contain entries for items no longer owned. The subject bibliographers, in cooperation with teaching faculty members, may be able to improve this situation. Finally, increased awareness of the availability of interlibrary loan services--perhaps publicized in the student newspaper and in bibliographic instruction sessions--should help alleviate students' concerns in this regard.

The telephone survey offered the library faculty another opportunity to learn more about students' perceptions of the library. It provides the Committee with valuable baseline data for comparison with results of future studies. Coupled with the other instruments used in the assessment package, it is a valuable tool to be used in management decision-making and long-range planning.

Appendix A

phone number _____ date _____

rank _____ gender _____

STUDENT USAGE SURVEY

Hello. I'm _____ with Ward Edwards Library. You have been randomly selected from a list of Central students to give us your opinions. It should only take about two minutes. All your answers will be confidential.

(IF RESPONDENT SAYS HE/SHE NEVER USES THIS LIBRARY, TELL THEM THAT IS NOT UNCOMMON AND WE ARE INTERESTED IN ALL CENTRAL STUDENTS, NOT JUST THOSE WHO USE THE LIBRARY.)

1. Are you an employee of Library Services?

   _____ yes (TERMINATE AND THANK)

   _____ no

2. What is your major?

   _____

3. Have you been to the CMSU library this academic year?

   _____ yes

   _____ no (SKIP TO Q7)

4. How often have you been to the CMSU library this academic year?

   _____ once a week

   _____ more than once a week

   _____ every few weeks

   _____ several times a semester

5. When you do use the CMSU library, what do you use it for? Please indicate all that apply.

_____ to study

_____ to check out materials

_____ to use the computer lab

_____ to use the copiers

_____ to read current newspapers and magazines

_____ to complete class assignments

_____ to get help finding information

_____ to socialize

_____ to meet for a group project

_____ other _____

6. What, if anything, discourages you from using the CMSU library? Please indicate all that apply.

_____ concerns about security

_____ hours--> What hours would suit you better?

_____

_____ noise

_____ temperature

_____ parking

_____ prefer to use another library--> Which library do you use? _____

_____ not enough help available

_____ library does not have the materials I need

_____ other _____

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

7. What discourages you from using the CMSU library? Please indicate all that apply.

_____ not required for my coursework

_____ no need

_____ use another library

_____ library doesn't have the materials I need

_____ library is not open when I want to use it-->
What hours would be more convenient?

_____

_____ other _____

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Appendix B

STUDENT USES FOR WARD EDWARDS LIBRARY BY RANK

	fr	so	jr	sr	grad	masters	post bacc	specialist
study	72.2%	74.1%	65.6%	53.3%	100.0%	23.8%	25.0%	0.0%
check out materials	77.8%	81.5%	78.1%	88.9%	100.0%	85.7%	75.0%	100.0%
use comp. lab	42.6%	37.0%	37.5%	31.1%	0.0%	28.6%	25.0%	0.0%
use copiers	61.1%	74.1%	71.9%	71.1%	100.0%	57.1%	75.0%	100.0%
read papers/mags	42.6%	44.4%	46.9%	31.1%	100.0%	28.6%	50.0%	100.0%
complete class work	77.8%	85.2%	93.8%	80.0%	100.0%	52.4%	50.0%	100.0%
help to find info	64.8%	66.7%	68.8%	71.1%	50.0%	52.4%	50.0%	100.0%
socialize	16.7%	14.8%	9.4%	6.7%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%
meet for group work	38.9%	44.4%	59.4%	48.9%	50.0%	28.6%	50.0%	100.0%
other	5.6%	7.4%	3.1%	4.4%	0.0%	9.6%	0.0%	0.0%

Note: Freshmen=54, Sophomore=27, Junior=32, Senior=45, Graduate*=2, Masters=21, Post Bacc**=4, and Specialist=1.

* Non-degree-seeking students enrolled in graduate hours
** Students with a bachelor's degree who are enrolled in undergraduate hours

NOTES

1. Littlejohn, Nancy, Mary Tygett, and Barbara Wales. *Assessment Design for Academic Libraries: Measuring Patron and Employee Satisfaction with Services and Operations*. Warrensburg: Central Missouri State University, 1994. ERIC, ED 373782.

2. Schlicter, Doris J., and J. Michael Pemberton, "The Emperor's New Clothes? Problems of the User Survey as a Planning Tool in Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 53, no. 3 (May 1992): 259.

3. *User Surveys*, SPEC kit, no. 148 (Washington: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, 1988); *User Surveys and Evaluation of Library Services*, SPEC kit, no. 71 (Washington: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies, 1981); *User Surveys in ARL Libraries*, SPEC kit, no. 205 (Washington, Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services, 1994).

4. Numerous sources provide assistance in designing telephone surveys; e.g., Dillman, Don A., *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method* (New York: Wiley, 1978); Fowler, Floyd J. Jr., *Survey Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993); Frey, James H., *Survey Research By Telephone* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983); Lavrakas, Paul J., *Telephone Survey Methods: Sampling, Selection and Supervision*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993).

5. Lavrakas, *Telephone Survey Methods*, 5.

6. Dillman, *Mail and Telephone Surveys*, 234-38.

7. Crist, Margo, Peggy Daub, and Barbara MacAdam, "User Studies: Reality Check and Future Perfect," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 68, no. 6 (February 1994): 40.